

THIS MAN WELCOMES SINNERS AND EATS WITH THEM**Sermon for the 4th Sunday in Lent 2022****Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is the Gospel we just heard read, Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32: ¹ **All the tax-collectors and other sinners were coming to Jesus to hear Him.** ² **However, the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled and said, “This Man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”**

³ **He told them this parable:...**

^{11b} **“A certain man had two sons. ¹² The younger one of them asked his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the property!’ So, he divided his property between them. ¹³ Not many days later the younger son got together all he had and left home for a distant country and there he wasted his possessions in wild living. ¹⁴ When he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ He went and attached himself to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ He longed to fill up on the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one would give him anything. ¹⁷ When he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired men have plenty of bread, and here I am starving to death. ¹⁸ I shall get up and go to my father and tell him, “Father, I have sinned against Heaven and against you. ¹⁹ I do not deserve to be called your son any longer. Make me one of your hired men!””**

²⁰ **“So, he got up and went to his father. While he was still far away, his father saw him and was filled with compassion. He ran, fell on his neck and kissed him. ²¹ The son told him, ‘Father, I have sinned against Heaven and against you. I do not deserve to be called your son any longer.’**

²² **“The father told his slaves, ‘Quickly, bring out a robe, the best one, and put it on him! Put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet! ²³ Bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and begin to celebrate! ²⁴ For this son of mine was dead and has come to life again. He was lost and has been found.’ They began to celebrate.**

²⁵ **“His elder son was in the field. As he was coming in and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ He called one of the servants and asked what this meant.**

²⁷ **“The servant answered, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound.’**

²⁸ **“However, the elder brother became angry and would not go in. His father came out and pleaded with him.**

²⁹ **“However, he answered his father, ‘Look! All these years I have been working like a slave for you and have never disobeyed a command of yours, and yet you have never given me a little goat to celebrate with my friends. ³⁰ However, as soon as this son of yours has come back, who has squandered your property with prostitutes, you have killed the fattened calf for him.’**

³¹ **“The father told him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and everything that I have is yours; ³² but we had to celebrate and be glad. For this brother of yours was dead and has come to life. He was lost and has been found.”**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Our text for today is well known to us, often being referred to as The Parable of the Prodigal Son. This title is found in 16th century English Bibles and goes back to the Latin Vulgate.

So far in His ministry, Jesus has been preaching the *good news of the kingdom*. He has been calling sinners to repentance so that they would receive from Him forgiveness for their sins. He has been gathering disciples, followers, who are eager to hear the divine wisdom coming from His lips. The people who are following Jesus are not always the best and the brightest or the cream of the crop, in fact, Jesus has been reaching out to the least, the last, and the lost. He’s been calling people whom the religious elite of Israel would look down on. He would even have meals with these people, these public sinners, and that was rather shocking. It wasn’t that Jesus approved of their sin or condoned it - far from it. But when sinners realised their sin and their lostness, Jesus offered them a safe haven to come to - back to God. Sinners troubled in their conscience were flocking to Jesus, for they knew that that was where they could find forgiveness and restoration.

That’s the situation we’re dealing with when we enter Luke chapter 15. Jesus is spending time with sinners, and the respectable people didn’t like it. Luke writes how the **“Pharisees and the scribes grumbled and said, “This Man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”**

Jesus perceived what was going on, and so He told some parables that addressed the attitude of the scribes and the Pharisees. First, He told a parable of a shepherd who went out to find his one lost sheep, and when he found it, he brought it home. He invited his friends and neighbours to rejoice with him because he had found his lost sheep. Same thing with a woman who found a lost coin for which she had been searching. She invited her friends and neighbours to rejoice with her. Jesus compares this to the rejoicing that's going on in heaven when He, Jesus, finds a lost sinner and brings him or her "back home," so to speak.¹ The implication, of course, is that if heaven is rejoicing over one lost sinner who has been restored, how come the scribes and Pharisees aren't rejoicing also? Why would they complain about such a wonderful and great thing as Jesus is doing in bringing back the lost?

So it is as we read the longest and the strongest *emotionally* of these Luke 15 parables, namely, the Parable of the Prodigal Son. We know how it starts. **"A certain man had two sons. ¹² The younger one of them asked his father, 'Father, give me my share of the property!' So, he divided his property between them."** That is equivalent to saying, *"Dad, I wish you were dead! I want what's coming to me!"* It was very disrespectful and shameful, and the father would have every right to punish this son for his outrageous behaviour, but he doesn't. He lets the younger son have his share of the estate, and the son **"left home for a distant country."**

At first, things seem to go well, but then we are told, **"he wasted his possessions in wild living."** That's where the word "prodigal" comes in. The term "prodigal" in this context means *"spending money or resources freely and recklessly; wastefully extravagant."* This is why we call him the "prodigal" son. But then the resources started to run dry. **"When he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ He went and attached himself to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ He longed to fill up on the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one would give him anything."** The young man was reduced, diminished, and humbled, and, if you're a Jewish boy, feeding pigs is about as low as you can go. He's hit rock bottom.

Thankfully, he starts to come to his senses. He said, **"How many of my father's hired men have plenty of bread, and here I am starving to death. ¹⁸ I shall get up and go to my father and tell him, 'Father, I have sinned against Heaven and against you. ¹⁹ I do not deserve to be called your son any longer. Make me one of your hired men!"**

So he arose and headed back home. But **"While he was still far away, his father saw him and was filled with compassion. He ran, fell on his neck and kissed him."** how unexpected this was! The father went running out to meet him! That was unheard of! And the father doesn't run out to give the son an 'ear-bashing.' No, he runs out to embrace him! He falls on his son's neck and showers him with affection! The son starts to recite his rehearsed speech about working it off as a servant, but Dad cuts him off before he can get to that. You see, the father doesn't want another hired hand. He wants his son back.

"The father told his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe, the best one, and put it on him! Put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet! ²³ Bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and begin to celebrate! ²⁴ For this son of mine was dead and has come to life again. He was lost and has been found.' They began to celebrate."

The father lavished his grace and generosity on this son, who clearly did not deserve it! He clothed his son with the best robe, restored his authority with the ring, provided sandals for his feet, and even slaughtered the fattened calf to be the main course of the feast. The father's joy was so great. He pulled out all the stops, and this is costly stuff he supplied. It was a very lavish, extravagant, and joyful celebration!

Of course, this parable is a picture of *how God welcomes us back*. He does so extravagantly. Lavishly does He shower His love and His grace on us, and we surely don't deserve it. In our baptism, God has clothed us with the robe of Christ's righteousness. He has restored us back to the household with the signet ring of the cross, and our feet have been shod with the gospel of peace.

Notice too that at the centre of this prodigal celebration, this lavish, extravagant celebration, is a feast, but in this feast, the feast of salvation, there is no fattened calf that has been slaughtered. Instead, it is *the Lamb of God who has been slain and sacrificed*. It is Christ Jesus, God's own Son, His beloved Son in whom He is well pleased - it is Jesus who has been sacrificed for sinners. Christ has gone to the cross for us, that our sins would be forgiven, and indeed, they have. This is costly grace indeed. Christ's holy precious blood has been shed for us so that now we have been restored to God's household. No work-it-off scheme is necessary. Jesus has already taken care of that. God wants us back as His children. He *"is our true Father and we are His true children"* (Introduction to the Lord's Prayer in the Small Catechism).

¹ Luke 15:1-10

However, there's still the older son to deal with. He was the stay-at-home son, the one who didn't leave home. He was resentful and jealous of all the attention and the big celebration the younger son received. He didn't want to attend the celebration but **"became angry and would not go in. His father came out and pleaded with him."**

This son would not go in and join in the celebration. So again, the father does something amazing, something costly, and something extravagant. **"His father came out and pleaded with him."** ²⁹ **"However, he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I have been working like a slave for you and have never disobeyed a command of yours, and yet you have never given me a little goat to celebrate with my friends."** ³⁰ **However, as soon as this son of yours has come back, who has squandered your property with prostitutes, you have killed the fattened calf for him.'**

The father put up with the older son's disrespect and was patient with him. He said, **"Son, you are always with me, and everything that I have is yours;"** ³² **but we had to celebrate and be glad. For this brother of yours was dead and has come to life. He was lost and has been found."**

Of course, the older son's attitude was equivalent to that of the Pharisees and scribes. They were really grumbling against God when they complained about how Jesus was receiving sinners and eating with them. They really ought to have rejoiced, like God does, whenever a lost child is brought back home. Instead, they were proud of the dutiful way in which they observed all of God's commands and felt fully justified in criticising Jesus for His fellowship with sinners and tax collectors. They were not about to join in joyfully celebrating the repentance of a sinner.

So be it. What we do know, however, is that God has restored us, and for that, we shall be eternally grateful. God is having a lavish celebration right here and right now. We are here at the celebration, here in the Lord's house, where heaven and earth come together. There is music, there is rejoicing, and there is a feast whenever we celebrate the Lord's Supper, eating and drinking the body and blood of Christ, the Lamb of God who has been sacrificed for sinners like you and me.

And this feast points us ahead to the heavenly banquet *still to come*. Talk about pulling out all the stops! What a party that will be! Heavenly music like we have never heard! Joy beyond imagining! At the centre of it all will be Christ our Saviour, risen from the dead, who lives and reigns to all eternity.

Yes, there is a big-time, blow-out, prodigal celebration in store for us all, and we're getting a little sampling of it here on earth. And so it is not with grumbling, but rather with gratitude, that we can say about Jesus: **"This Man welcomes sinners and eats with them."** Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

Lord, We praise You for all Your loving kindness. We rejoice that You have rescued us from darkness and eternal death, and blessed us with Your love, light, and life. We thank You that You have not punished us as we deserve, or repaid us for our sins. In Your love You have given Your only Son to carry our sins and to suffer for our transgressions, that we may not perish, but have eternal life. We thank You that through Him we can approach Your throne, confident that there we shall find mercy and help in every need. Give us daily joy in Your free forgiveness for all our sins, and in all the endless blessings of the Gospel.

O Lord, You are mindful of the needs of all people. You give daily bread to both the godly and the ungodly alike. We praise and thank you for supplying all our bodily needs. Enable us to use the lives You give and sustain to show forth Your love and care. Grant us the continuing gift of health, that we may serve You with joy through Him who is the bread of life, even Jesus Christ.

Give us opportunities to proclaim the Gospel of Christ to others who do not know it. Keep Your Church in Jesus Christ in the one true faith. Bless all schools, that all teachers may acknowledge You and serve You, and that all pupils may find in You the treasures of life and truth.

Give wisdom, integrity, and Your direction to all who wield authority, that we may worship and serve You without hindrance, and live in peace and righteousness. Protect us from the influence of wicked people, and preserve us in all dangers.

Give Your strength to all who suffer sickness, pain, disease, or any other trouble of body, mind, or spirit. Enable them to bear their cross with faith in Him who taught us to pray: "Your will be done". In His glorious name, and for His kingdom's sake, we pray these things. Amen.

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

Isaiah 12:1-6

¹ On that day you will say: "I shall praise You, O LORD. Although You have been angry with me, Your anger is turning away, and You are comforting me." ² Look! God is my Salvation. I shall be confident and not be startled. Indeed, the LORD, the LORD, is my Protection and Might and He has become my Salvation."

³ You will joyfully draw water from the wells of salvation. ⁴ On that day you people will say: "Praise the LORD! Call on His name! Make His deeds known among the peoples! Proclaim that His name is exalted! ⁵ Sing to the LORD! For He has done sublime things. Let this be known in all the earth! ⁶ Rejoice and shout for joy, O inhabitants of Zion! For the Holy One of Israel, who is among you, is great."

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

¹⁶ Therefore, from now on we do not regard anyone from a human point of view. Although we once regarded Christ from a human point of view, yet now we no longer regard Him in this way. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old things have passed away. Look! They have become new!

¹⁸ However, all things are from God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Christ and has given to us the ministry of reconciliation, ¹⁹ that God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors on Christ's behalf, since God, as it were, is making His appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: "Be reconciled to God!" ²¹ God made Him who did not know sin to be sin for us, that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.

Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

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